



# NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND  
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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## **NOAA's Fisheries Service Grants Federal Protection for Three Georgia Basin Rockfish Species**

NOAA's Fisheries Service today announced that it is listing three populations of rockfish in Washington's Georgia Basin for protection under the Endangered Species Act.

The populations of two of the rockfish species – canary and yelloweye – have been designated as “threatened” and a third rockfish species – bocaccio – as “endangered.” An endangered species is at high risk of extinction; a threatened species is vulnerable to extinction in the near future and in need of protection.

Populations of all three rockfish species in the Georgia Basin, which encompasses Puget Sound and the Strait of Georgia, were historically harvested at high levels, depleting their numbers. Rockfish are long-lived and mature slowly, with only sporadic episodes of successful reproduction, making them especially vulnerable to overfishing.

According to NOAA scientists, rockfish population growth has also been hampered because they are often caught unintentionally by fishermen targeting other species, and by environmental factors, such as degradation of their habitat near shore, pollution and lost fishing gear that continues to snare fish.

Although rockfish make up a substantial portion of the federally managed commercial bottomfish catch off the West Coast, especially off California, rockfish in Puget Sound are managed by the state.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife prohibits fishermen from keeping any rockfish they may accidentally catch in the Puget Sound region. The state agency also forbids bottomfishing in waters deeper than 120 feet, where most of these adult rockfish are found.

There is currently a broad state and federal effort to improve the sound's water quality and habitat through the Puget Sound Partnership, which is aimed at conserving all marine life, including rockfish. Resident killer whales, Chinook salmon, chum salmon, steelhead and bull trout are already protected in the sound under the Endangered Species Act.

Today's listing is in response to a petition from an Olympia resident who asked the agency in 2008 to list Puget Sound populations of five species of rockfish. In addition to the three proposed today, the petition also included greenstriped and redstriped rockfish. Agency scientists said these last two species are at a “low risk” of extinction, and protection under the ESA was not needed at this time.

NOAA held a 60-day public comment period on the listings, from April 23 to June 22, 2009, and received a total of five comment letters on the listing proposals from local and state government, the public and others familiar with rockfish biology and management. All substantive comments were considered and addressed.

For more information on the rockfish ESA listing, see the Web at:

<http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/Other-Marine-Species/Puget-Sound-Marine-Fishes/ESA-PS-Rockfish.cfm>

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